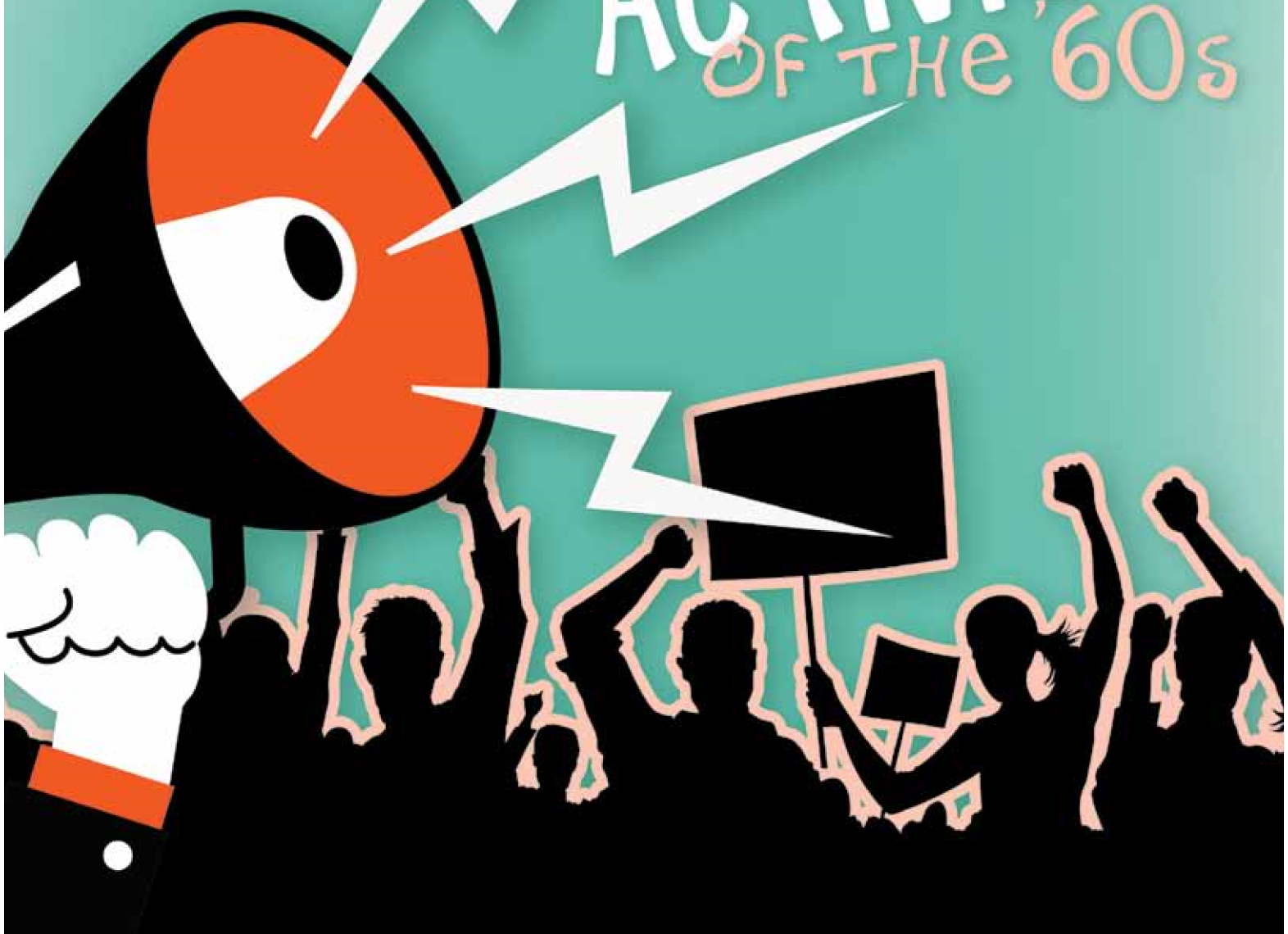


RESURRECTING

CAMPUS ACTIVISM OF THE '60s



For nearly no provocation, college agitators now routinely call for resignations, apologies, and restrictions. Though abjectly foolish, such campus intolerance was just a matter of time.

by Dr. Duke Pesta

Ever since the 1960s, folk music and campus protests have gone together hand in glove. The dulcet harmonies and vapid lyrics of many '60s folk tunes provided the perfect mood music for the simplistic tantrums that engulfed American universities during that turbulent decade. Take a nostalgic listen sometime to the cringe-worthy lyrics of such songs as “If I Had a Hammer” and “Big Yellow Taxi” to sample the rather callow spirit of the age. It was tempting to hope that the era of such preening lyrical fluff met its end when John Belushi unceremoniously smashed into a wall the folk singer’s guitar in the 1978 movie *Animal House*, a statement that seemed to punctuate the demise of folk rock the same way that Disco Demolition Night at Chicago’s Comiskey Park spelled the end of disco in 1979. And though popular music continues to evolve, not always for the better, the same hackneyed campus discontent continues to flare up from the embers of the self-indulgent sit-ins and hyperbolic demands of 1960s protest culture, as new generations of impressionable students arrive on campus to fuel the flames of social unrest.

Cold Missouri Waters: How Show Me State Radicals Opened the Floodgates

The flashpoint for this latest iteration of campus discord is the recent protests at the University of Missouri, an upheaval that has spilled over to campuses across the country. Formal protests broke out September 24, 2015, at a “Racism Lives Here” rally that sought to draw attention to a number of alleged racial incidents on campus that, according to protesters, were inadequately addressed by UM administrators. The incidents, spanning a period of five years, include anecdotal episodes and things that did not even occur on campus, such as student government president Payton Head’s claim that racial slurs were directed at him by unidentified individuals driving a pickup truck outside university property. Other notable incidents include two white students arrested for dropping cotton balls in front of the Black Culture Center in 2010. The students were

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charged with tampering in the second degree, a Class D felony upgraded because of a hate-crime classification. Further reports detail a drunken student using a racial slur and racially charged graffiti in a dorm room, dating from 2011. A critical escalation of campus tensions took place on October 24, 2015 when police were summoned to a dorm where an unidentified person allegedly smeared feces in the shape of a swastika on a bathroom wall.

Angry that UM system president Timothy Wolfe did not initiate wide-scale campus reforms to counter these episodes — cited as evidence of systemic racism — student protest organizer and activist Jonathan Butler undertook a much-publicized hunger strike to force Wolfe’s resignation. Shortly thereafter, during recruiting day on the UM campus in front of hundreds of prospective students, protesters interrupted the university tour to stage a “mock tour” where they read a list of racist incidents at the school and scattered cotton balls in front of the Black Culture Center (this time, no one was arrested or charged

with a hate crime). The next day, primarily black players on the football team vowed not to practice or play until Wolfe resigned, even threatening to forfeit their upcoming game against Brigham Young University. Almost immediately, Wolfe resigned and the school’s chancellor announced his impending retirement.

An interesting side note to the story is the background of Butler, who has matriculated at the UM campus for the last seven years, and who comes from a family of great wealth. His father, an executive for Union Pacific Railroad, made \$8.4 million in compensation in 2014, and the family’s estimated worth is \$20 million, a portfolio that enables young Butler to enjoy a lifestyle well beyond that of most of the white UM students whose privilege he seeks to expose. Butler had already earned his bachelor’s degree in business administration and was working on his master’s degree at the time of his hunger strike. He is also a veteran of the Ferguson protests and called the resistance and subsequent riots “monumental in terms of



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Just follow the crowd: “Spontaneous” student protests were organized and abetted by Black Lives Matter activists in the wake of Ferguson.

how it influenced me,” and called his activism at UM “the post-Ferguson effect.” Not surprisingly, non-student activists from the Black Lives Matter coalition were prominent fixtures driving the ensuing protests at UM.

Just about anyone living outside a typical American campus might be excused for wondering if the level of racial “oppression” documented (although not always verified) by the protestors rose to the level of hunger strikes (or in this case a brief fast), top-level resignations, and nationwide handwringing of the sort that drives the 24/7 media cycle. Division one athletes on full-ride football scholarships, for example, are hardly deprived, and there does seem to be at least a hint of irony in the fact that much of the protesting took place against the backdrop of UM’s bustling and well-funded Black Culture Center. But as Saul Alinsky wrote and Rahm Emanuel advised, crises, even manufactured ones, are grist for the revolutionary mill, especially on campus, where progressive faculty and administrators are already prone to capitulate to almost any demand articulated in the indignant vocabulary of social-justice dogma.

This skepticism might be further justified in considering the endgame of such protests, specifically the extensive list of demands put forth as the necessary precondition for a cessation of demonstrations. Besides the resignation of Wolfe, protestors demanded he “acknowledge his white male privilege” — a purely symbolic twist of the knife, as the protestors required his removal whether he confessed his offending whiteness or not. Beyond this, sweeping reforms were required, including that UM “create and enforce comprehensive racial awareness and inclusion curriculum throughout all campus departments and units,” and make them “mandatory for all students, faculty, staff, and administration.” Further, the curriculum “must be vetted, maintained,

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The downtrodden? Jonathan Butler, child of wealth and privilege, purports to expose white privilege with the help of Ferguson activists.

and overseen by a board comprised of students, staff, and faculty of color.” In other words, turn over what is taught and how it is taught to a committee whose primary purpose is advocacy, not education. And what would a cultural reprogramming be without a loyal class of bureaucrats: “We demand that the University of Missouri increases funding, resources, and personnel for the social justices [sic] centers on campus for the purpose of hiring additional professionals, particularly those of color, boosting outreach and programming across campus.”

These and similar demands on campuses across the country amount to a de facto recommissioning of the very purpose and mission of colleges and universities, transforming campuses into agents of a very particular and highly politicized type of social activism. These new-made institutions, dedicated to social justice as narrowly defined by progressive special-interest groups, would be empowered to regulate, override, and altogether politicize education, even going so far as to ad-

judicate on the basis of things such as race, gender, sexuality, or even class, and fully justified in silencing dissent, undermining the right to speech, and *discriminating* in the furtherance of their new mandate. And yet, these transformations are much farther along than people outside of academia realize. In order to understand this unmaking of education, we must revisit the history of campus radicalism since World War II.

The Times They Aren’t A-Changing: Replaying the Golden Oldies of Campus Activism

For decades the simmering insanity of political correctness on college campuses has churned and frothed, slowly boiling away constitutionally protected rights to freedom of speech, assembly, and religious expression for students and dissenting professors alike. Over the last 15 years, the steady seethe of progressive social engineering on campus has become an outright pressure cooker, venting in short order such soft-boiled pabulum as campus safe spots, free speech zones, trigger warnings, white privilege studies, and micro-aggressions — Orwellian constructs that contribute to the expanding ideological harassment, unequal application of rules, and outright censorship of ideas that typify modern campus life. The fetishized mania for slippery and self-serving concepts such as “diversity” and “tolerance” — shibboleths defined exclusively by insulated, un-

accountable, and almost uniformly white academics — has transformed universities from places of critical thinking and free exploration into sites of ideological conformity, dangerous groupthink, and the outright persecution of ideas that might resonate outside the echo chamber of progressive politics. So extreme has this witches' brew of sanctimony and quasi-Marxist dogma become that the cauldron has begun to boil over, and more and more liberal and progressive faculty and administrators — not just conservative bogeys — find themselves scalded.

Considering the history of the American campus since World War II, it was inevitable that the long march of progressivism through the halls of academe would finally result in the politically monolithic and repressive institutions we see today. Less predictable, though, was the path this transformation would take. As soon as the first returning troops stormed campuses under the GI Bill, academics undertook the job of reprogramming them, contextualizing their service and sacrifice in ways very different from those impressed upon them in their local papers, community centers, and pulpits — to say nothing of their recruiting stations, boot camps, and the trenches in which they battled. These veterans opened the universities to battalions of young men (and some women) who in pre-war America would have been discouraged from attending college — or frozen out altogether — on the basis of culture, class, or finances. They were met in the classroom by a rising generation of young professors, including many who did not or could not serve. This emerging professoriate, safely ensconced on campus during the war, was often sympathetic to collectivism, to socialism, and to revolution — and comfortable even with violence on those terms — while simultaneously skeptical of bourgeois American values such as faith and patriotism. The resulting intersection was potentially incendiary, bringing together in the classroom increasingly leftist faculty and often disillusioned and traumatized vets, eager for recognition and a future worthy of their sacrifice: a perfect meeting of ideological master and vulnerable medium.

This aspect of the radicalization of campus is generally forgotten in the retrospectively projected and historically inaccurate

Norman Rockwell idyll that would become the 1950s for most Americans living today. Without that critical backstory, the campus revolutions of the 1960s — and by extension the current crop of juvenile and intolerant protests on the quad — seem more spontaneous and unified than in reality they were. The story of '60s radicalism in universities needs no rehearsal here, other than to underscore how swiftly the campuses were transformed from sites that valued and preserved the ideas that gave rise to the tremendous prosperity and relative freedoms of Western culture, to places where idealistic young radicals were trained to deconstruct, protest, and reject without understanding the complicated yet undoubtedly freedom-generating history of the West.

There are reasons, after all, why things such as human rights, civil rights, the abolition of slavery, suffrage, free speech and press, and a host of other societal goods emerged and became codified as law in Western nations well before the rest of the world. Indeed, there exist many places outside of Western culture where such foundational ideas remain but a distant and seemingly unattainable dream. Before the radicalization of the campus in the '60s, even most progressives understood that these necessary ideas arose primarily out of the Western tradition, and were fueled more often than not by Judeo-

Christian values working in and through culture. Our university students are no longer taught this broader view of Western culture, one that teaches frankly our failures and injustices, but does so while also detailing the triumphs and advancements of liberty. Far too many students are taught to view issues such as slavery and colonialism as exclusively American or Western phenomena, and they can no longer articulate anything meaningful about the Sermon on the Mount, the Magna Carta, or even the U.S. Constitution.

The Marxist revisionism of history in our colleges and universities — and the Howard Zinnification of history books in our primary and secondary schools — has entirely recast the past so as to blame the West exclusively for the world's evils. To point out that many of these evils are demonstrably more pronounced, savage, and unredressed in non-Western cultures is to violate the first commandment of multiculturalism: Thou Shalt Only Disparage Thine Own Culture. Progressive campus doublespeak now requires that we isolate and magnify the sins of Western culture while simultaneously indemnifying all non-Western cultures of their entrenched and often ongoing evils: or worse yet, project the origins of those evils back onto Western culture itself. Warmed-over socialist fan boys such as Bernie Sanders



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More sheep than wolf: UM System President Tim Wolfe resigns amid manufactured campus outrage.

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or Bill de Blasio might honeymoon in the Soviet Union or Cuba, respectively, but they would never emigrate there, and the typical tenured academic feminist who spends her vitriol railing against Christian patriarchy and sexism in the universities has little to say about the treatment of women in various Middle Eastern or Asian cultures, much less carry the crusade to those places directly.

Blowin' in the Wind: Hot Air, Not Hard Truths

Since this variant of the Cultural Revolution blossomed on American campuses in the 1960s, the movement has continued apace. First came a period of consolidation through the 1980s, where curriculum and pedagogy were transformed. The hiring process in academia — almost exclusively the insular province of faculty within the various disciplines — began both to purge existing faculty who challenged the new progressive orthodoxy and, more ominously, to subject new hires to increasingly narrow ideological scrutiny, effectively freezing out diverse or dissenting voices from faculty positions. Numerous studies have been done demonstrating that intellectual and political diversity across academic departments is sorely lacking, and especially absent in the humanities.

Ironically — and hypocritically — the greater the push for diversity of gender, race, and sexual preference in the hiring process, the more consciously homogeneous and monolithic the academy became in its ideas and attitudes. Looking different and feeling different trumped thinking differently, as the university's primary stock in trade — the free exchange of ideas — was jettisoned in favor of the very sorts of things it claimed most to oppose: superficial considerations of skin color, gender, or sex. Or as life-long academic and pre-eminent economist (and African American to boot) Thomas Sowell puts it: "The next

time some academics tell you how important diversity is, ask how many Republicans there are in their sociology department." And speaking of economists, recent data released by the Open Syllabus Project — after surveying more than one million syllabi — shows that *The Communist Manifesto* remains one of the most widely assigned books on college campuses, both in economics departments and across all other disciplines, and by a large margin.

During this period of consolidation, "Hey Hey, Ho Ho, Western Culture Has to Go" became something more than a hemp-addled hippie slogan, as the very idea of a discrete "American culture" or cohesive understanding of "Western values" was undermined in favor of postmodern notions of fragmentation, alienation, and decay. And yet the same academics who insist that America is a land and a people without any specific, traceable, or coalescing culture or language, nevertheless croak loudly about

the irreducibly authentic and unique cultural values of non-Western peoples and nations, and even minority cultures within the United States. American Christianity, for example, is Waspish, intolerant, irrational, patriarchal, and embarrassingly provincial, but *black* Christianity is "authentic," or "spiritual," or a cultural representation of faith, or endurance, or empowerment. And on and on it goes.

In the classroom, less and less emphasis was placed on the classics, the canon, and the tradition, and more and more time devoted to marginal, tendentious, and politicized texts that critiqued and rejected the basic premises of Western philosophy, art, literature, and politics. Along with the rise of multiculturalism — which disingenuously claimed that American students were already thoroughly acquainted with the great books of Western culture, and therefore in need of a steady diet of non-Western books — the '70s and '80s witnessed in rapid fashion the rise of identity studies programs, degrees in social justice activism, and the advent of theoretical methodologies such as feminism, post-colonialism, and deconstruction, all subsets of Marxist and materialist understandings of culture. These critical lenses have so swept academic discourse and dominated academic publishing as to all but guarantee that when the great books of



Berkeley: Except for the black-and-white footage, today's campus protests are indistinguishable from those of the 1960s.

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the Western tradition are taught, they are pulled inside out and subordinated to the political imperatives of the critic and the theory. Those few feeble efforts to push back against this hijacking of the classroom — including the creation of Great Books programs at schools such as the University of Chicago, or mandatory summer reading lists for incoming freshmen — have backfired entirely, as the lists and requirements remain, even as the classics have been purged to make room for even more progressive and tendentious tomes that make up the ubiquitous freshman studies courses and seminars required of all incoming students.

Puff the Liberal Dragon: Social Justice Warriors Against Freedom

Moving from the period of assimilation (1950s-1960s) through the period of consolidation (1970s-1980s), we come now to the dawning of the Age of Intolerance (1990s-?). Unlike the *Age of Aquarius*, where “let the sunshine in” was the jubilant refrain, the disinfecting properties of sunlight are increasingly absent from the modern campus, where largely unaccountable administrators, hordes of diversity officers, politicized student organizations, grievance studies faculty, and even dormitory directors impose edicts, erect free speech zones, disinvite conservative commencement speakers, ban Bible studies from dorm rooms, throw pies at those with different opinions, uproot crosses commemorating victims of abortion, shout down journalists and threaten them with “muscle” for daring to report, cancel open colloquia because the ideas expressed make them “uncomfortable,” and generally pander to every left-wing excess, while implicitly and explicitly monitoring, pressuring, silencing, and outright discriminating against students — and the rare faculty member — who stray outside the progressive codes and assumptions that govern campus life and thought.

In the '60s, the music group called *The Fifth Dimension* could indeed sing of “mystic crystal revelations, and the mind’s true liberations,” but in the 20-teens it would take a fifth dimension indeed, or perhaps an alternate universe, for genuine liberation of the mind amid all that smug conformity and self-congratu-



Diversity for me, not for thee: Diversity of ideas is predictably absent from lists of aggrieved students’ demands at universities. If you’re not a minority “victim,” shut your mouth.

latory censoriousness. And that’s what is so mystifying about the modern campus, and yet so predictable too. Living in an echo chamber for so long, the collective that is the academic Left has become the thing it most claims to hate: judgmental, intolerant, angry and unwilling to debate, slanderous, humorless, racist in opposing racism, sexist in opposing sexism, quick to ban, to exclude, to silence, zealous as a Puritan, indignant as an inquisitor. In short, it’s an honest-to-goodness religion, but not the type that actually exists in the real world much anymore (at least in the West), but the type that is caricatured and incinerated as a straw man in university classrooms across the country.

And such observations bring us back to the University of Missouri, where the intolerance of the newest generation of campus radicals has grown too irrational to be contained even by the progressive faculty in whose cozy academic laboratories this particular Frankenstein was created. The ongoing ideological purge of even moderately conservative voices — at least in numbers sufficiently strong and administrative positions marginally powerful — has created a sacrificial void on campus. The monster is now coming for its maker, and the shortage of right-leaning scapegoats means more and more reliably liberal faculty and administrators fall victim to the beast. At venerable old Princeton, for instance, the movement seeks to remove the name of progressive icon and Princeton alum Woodrow Wilson from campus buildings bearing his name,

a consequence of his eugenicist views. (The more stridently eugenicist views of Margaret Sanger, however, have yet to call into question the reverence for Planned Parenthood on college campuses.) Wilson, one of only two U.S. presidents to graduate from Princeton, may in short order find himself on the ash heap of history alongside statues of Robert E. Lee and the Confederate flag, and this despite being the most progressive president in American history to that point in time.

And then there is the saga of staunchly liberal and vocally feminist professor Laura Kipnis, who teaches Radio, TV, and Film at Northwestern. In early 2015, she wrote a piece for the *Chronicle of Higher Education* satirizing the “sexual paranoia” and hyperbolic talk of “rape culture” on American campuses. In response, two students filed Title IX complaints against her, arguing that her essay was retaliation against them for expressing such extremist views in their papers for her class. Because of draconian changes to Title IX under the Obama administration, the university had much broader latitude to open proceedings against Kipnis, who was eventually exonerated after undergoing a needless and intrusive process that sent a clear message to those who value satire and dissent. Indeed, among other anti-American provisions, the new Title IX guidelines also undermine the ability of those accused of rape or sexual assault on campus to exercise basic due process rights and defend themselves from the charges.

At Smith College in Massachusetts,

President Kathleen McCartney had the temerity to write “all lives matter” in an e-mail to students that was designed, ironically, to show support for the protesters in Missouri: “We are united in our insistence that all lives matter.” The backlash was swift and unrelenting, despite her impeccably progressive credentials and her presidency at the school that graduated both Gloria Steinem and Betty Friedan. McCartney retreated quickly and abjectly: “I regret that I was unaware that the phrase/hashtag ‘all lives matter’ has been used by some to draw attention away from the focus on institutional violence against Black people.” Black Lives Matter co-founder and self-appointed language cop Marissa Jenae Johnson recently declared that the phrase “all lives matter” is now unequivocally a racial slur. And in their long, shrill, and altogether fascist list of demands to President Carolyn Martin of Amherst College, students demanded that Martin

“issue a statement to the Amherst College community at large that states we do not tolerate the actions of student(s) who posted the ‘All Lives Matter’ and ‘Free Speech’ posters.” This triply offensive assault on basic freedoms in the name of “tolerance” takes the cake, seeking to ban both speech and posted material, and then compel a university president to serve as a ventriloquist dummy who simply speaks into “law” the protesters’ bigoted undermining of constitutionally guaranteed rights.

We might continue with the story of a long-serving progressive professor at Harvard who faced intense hostility and calls for termination for simply suggesting that Halloween was a holiday for costumes, and that perhaps the preemptive letter sent to all students warning them about culturally insensitive costumes went too far down the path of censorship. Or we might discuss the situation of committed progressive William Covino, president of California State University, Los Angeles, who intervened to disinvite conservative speaker Ben Shapiro from speaking on campus until arrangements could be made



Feminist professor caught up: In the sausage grinder of radical campus politics, Laura Kipnis’ liberal bona fides didn’t guarantee her protection from student zealots.

to pair him with a liberal speaker for the sake of diversity of perspective. Not surprisingly, dozens of previous speakers — all progressives — were allowed to speak without protest or any such concern for diversity of thought. Despite Covino’s best efforts to preempt the left-wing grievance machine by behaving as an intolerant bully, it was apparent in the backlash that he really could not legally keep the defiant Shapiro away from campus. Shapiro spoke despite protesting students who blocked the entrance, bullied attendees, and barricaded the doors so people could not exit when it was over. Shapiro had to be escorted off campus by police because of threats from the student protesters. And yet irrespective of Covino’s valiant efforts on behalf of censorship and left-wing hypocrisy, the irate

students are still calling for his resignation for “allowing” Shapiro to speak at all.

However much *schadenfreude* conservatives might enjoy at the prospect of all this progressive cannibalism on college campuses, the chilling fact remains that university culture is already so dangerously monolithic, doctrinaire, and ideologically intolerant that the students most in need of safe spaces are the ones who dare dissent or hold a different understanding from the progressive orthodoxy: in other words, the very students least likely to call for such juvenile coddling. And yet, this same domineering orthodoxy of campus radicals paradoxically portrays itself as both vulnerable and oppressed, even as it bullies, threatens, and censors anyone who dares challenge it.

The students who scream, paint their faces with fake blood, and physically shut down opposing ideas are the same ones who retreat to their

dorms and whine about how they are misunderstood and persecuted, demanding protection from opinions that make them uncomfortable and guarantees that their fragile psyches will never encounter ideas they don’t like. But history has shown time and again that such incompatible egoism and insecurity is a hallmark of all proto-fascist movements. And in the end, all of this prompts the question: If American universities are indeed hopeless cesspools of racism, sexism, and homophobia, intolerant sites of white privilege that foster rape culture, then what does that say about the progressive monopoly of campus after all these decades? And can we any longer entrust higher education to people who both foster and enable such oppression? ■



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